TCAP Grade 2 Fluency Item:
Alignment, Design, and Research Foundation

In its 2016 research and policy brief, *Setting the Foundation: A Report on Elementary Grades Reading in Tennessee*, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) laid out its plan to reach the state's "Read to be Ready" goal of having 75 percent of its third grade students proficient in reading by 2025. Part of the state's plan is to "support deeper literacy instruction to ensure that students learn decoding within the context of broader comprehension" (TDOE 2016, p. 5). This instructional shift encourages methods that will help students connect skill-based competencies (e.g., fluency) to knowledge-based competencies (e.g., comprehension). As part of this effort, the emerging Grade 2 Assessment will become part of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) in 2017. The Grade 2 Assessment includes a measure of fluency that connects students' basic decoding skills with their comprehension at the sentence level.

Alignment and Design

The operational Grade 2 Assessment will include one item aligned to Tennessee standard 2.RF.4.a: *(RF) Reading Foundational Skills. Fluency. (4) Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. (a) Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.*

For the fluency item, the teacher (or proctor) will read aloud a simple set of directions to the class: *Here are 20 sentences. Read each sentence and ask yourself: Is this sentence true? Mark YES or NO to answer the question for each sentence. Do not start until I say "Go." Do as many as you can before I say "Stop."*

Students will see a set of twenty sentences in their test booklets, varying in length from four to eight words (four each with four, five, six, seven, and eight words per sentence). Each sentence includes words that are at or below the second grade reading level, according to the *Children's Writer's Word Book* (Mogilner & Mogilner, 2006) and the *EDL Core Vocabularies in Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies* (Taylor et al., 1989). Each sentence is structured to present a statement that is easily recognizable as true or not true, as determined by grade-level content experts and verified through a rigorous content and bias review process. Students will have a set amount of time to read the sentences and mark YES or NO as directed. The number of sentences that students answer correctly will be translated into a 0–5 score. The use of the 0–5 scale ensures that the fluency score has the appropriate weight in the calculation of a student's overall English language arts (ELA) score.

Research Foundation

To design the Grade 2 fluency item, two lines of research were used. The first is related to the sentence verification technique (SVT) and the second involves the benefits of measuring silent reading fluency through items that focus on reading comprehension.

The SVT is based on the idea that "language comprehension is a constructive process in which an incoming linguistic message, the recipient's prior knowledge, and the environmental context in which the message is received all interact to determine the nature of the comprehended material" (Bransford & McCarrell, 1974, as cited in Royer, Hastings, & Hook, 1979, p. 355). Used with students in third grade and above, the SVT involves presenting students with short passages (typically 9–16 sentences in length). After reading the passage, students are presented with sentences, ranging in difficulty, that are written to either have the same meaning (original sentence or a paraphrase of a sentence) or a different meaning from sentences as presented in the passage. Students are asked to identify YES for those sentences that are the same or mean the same as a sentence in the passage, and NO for sentences that do not have the same meaning.

Several studies provide validity evidence for the SVT as a measure of reading comprehension (e.g., Lynch, 1982; Royer et al., 1979; Vidyasagar & Bhogle, 2013). Whereas the SVT provides a unique means to evaluate reading comprehension, this technique is not viewed as a viable option for the Grade 2 Assessment for two main reasons: (1) the complexity of the directions and the reading burden associated with the passages and sentences are considered to be too great a burden on second grade students, and (2) the technique requires a substantial amount of time to complete. Because including a measure of fluency is an important building block in the blueprint for the Grade 2 Assessment, the TDOE remains committed to finding measures that would be maximally efficient for both students and teachers.

As Price, Meisinger, Louwerse, and D'Mello explain in their article "Silent Reading Fluency Using Underlining: Evidence for an Alternative Method of Assessment" (2012), traditionally there has been an overemphasis on oral reading fluency (ORF) in the classroom. ORF is typically assessed in situations where students "read aloud from a passage while their reading errors (i.e., miscues) and reading rate are recorded" (Price et al., 2012, p. 2). This type of assessment method does not connect decoding skills to a measure of comprehension; it requires substantial one-on-one time per student; and it does not address the "need to pay closer consideration to oral reading's often ignored counterpart, silent reading" (Price et al., 2012, p. 2). In a 2012 study, Yildirim and Ates found that "silent reading fluency had more significant contribution to the prediction of reading comprehension than oral reading fluency" (p. 79). Many specialists within the field of literacy research highlight the distinct value of silent reading fluency measures that relate to comprehension (e.g., Berninger et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2011; Taylor 2006).

The Grade 2 Assessment fluency item measures fluency in the context of silent reading and connects reading accuracy to comprehension. It has similar design components to The Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension (TOSREC) (Wagner, Torgesen, Rashoette, & Pearson, 2010).

According to the Multi-Heath Systems website, the TOSREC is appropriate for use with first through tenth grade students and requires "respondents to read and verify the truthfulness of as many sentences as possible within 3 minutes." The website highlights the fact that group administration is possible, which "dramatically improves efficiency and cost-effectiveness." In their 2011 report "Validity Evidence for the Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension (TOSREC)," Johnson, Pool, and Carter found that "TOSREC provides an efficient measure of reading fluency that has the potential to perform as well in predicting broader reading performance as ORF" (p. 55). The rationale and structure of the TOSREC and the Grade 2 fluency item are similar. Drawing from the research on the TOSREC, the TCAP fluency assessment item has the potential to provide useful information for Tennessee's second grade teachers about their students' overall reading fluency that combines fluency with comprehension.

In addition to the research foundation, the 2016 fall field test of Grade 2 Assessment will provide student response data that will be used to validate the design of the fluency items and ensure that the items are performing as intended. By including this type of item on the assessment, the TDOE hopes to contribute to the "Read to be Ready" goal and work with educators across the state to emphasize silent reading fluency as a key competency for young readers.

References

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